

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH REAR ADMIRAL PHILIP HART CULLOM,
U.S. NAVY, COMMANDER, CARRIER STRIKE GROUP 8, VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: UNITAS
ATLANTIC TIME: 9:00 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2008

Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

ADM. CULLOM: Okay. This is the admiral. I'm ready to start out. Is
that okay if I kind of -- just kind of open it up here?

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Yes, sir.
I'd just like to let everybody know that we're speaking this morning with Rear
Admiral Philip Cullom. He is the commander of Carrier Strike Group 8, just
happened to be circumnavigating South America right now. So, sir, if -- the
floor is yours, whenever you are ready.

ADM. CULLOM: Okay. Well, hello, everybody. Since we've only got, I
guess, about 20 minutes or so, I want to get right to it and begin by sharing
with you three facts that I kind of think are central to this discussion. I
actually was up on the bridge this morning watching the sun rise and was
trying to collect my thoughts for this conversation this morning.

But I think every single thing that we discuss during a roundtable is
kind of going to be driven by three primary points.

You know, the first one -- and this was as I was looking out at the
water -- is that 70 percent of the world is covered by water; and that kind of
the second thing is that 80 percent of the world's population lives probably
within about a hundred miles of a coastline; and then finally that 90 percent of
the world's trade directly depends on the oceans and the seas and the bays,
inlands, islands, coastal areas, rivers and even the airspace above them. So
you know, kind of in essence, the Earth is mostly ocean.

Arthur C. Clarke, I think, said it right. He said, "How inappropriate
to call the planet Earth when clearly it's Ocean."

And it's because the world's mainly ocean that no one nation and really
no one navy can meet all of the world's maritime challenges. We simply have to
work together. And that's really the overarching reason that we're
participating in partnership with the Americas, which is what we're doing as we
go around South America here.

More specifically, though, we want to achieve three following goals
while we're going around South America.

The first is that we want a hemisphere that's secure for all. The threats to our security from the maritime are real, such as criminal organizations, violations of the fishing grounds, pandemic diseases and piracy. And we all suffer devastating natural disasters, such as the volcanic eruptions in Chile that just happened recently. And we also share the threat that earthquakes, storms, floods and mudslides may impact us. We're experiencing -- we all experience appalling corruption and depravity that occurs with the trafficking of illegal drugs and the human slaves.

The second thing: You know, I think we're -- we are committed to fostering and sustaining equal and cooperative relationships with the other nations in our hemisphere and we care greatly about those relationships. And this is the third year, for instance, that the U.S. surface units have participated in partnership in the Americas. This represents our ongoing commitment to building trusted partnerships with other nations that are in the hemisphere.

And then the final thing really is -- and this is based on the discussions that we've already had up in Brazil and in Argentina -- is that we want prosperity for the entire hemisphere and really the world. Every day, hundreds of thousands of container ships -- and we're seeing them out here as we funnel down to the Strait of Magellan -- they transit the globe for specific purposes for worldwide trade that directly promotes prosperity for all nations. As long as the shipping lanes are open for trade, commerce can flourish, but when commerce is strong, economies are robust. And a rising tide of commerce is what floats all boats.

We can only accomplish that if we work as equal partners that are committed to building connections that strengthen, you know, our collective ability to meet the regional challenges that we're seeing. But together we've got to discover the cooperative solutions that lead to a secure and more stable hemisphere.

And that's really why we've been training with our partners. We conducted flight ops with Brazilian naval and air force units for combined air defense and strike group training and we've tested our interoperability and we're learning from each other's capabilities and experiences. As part of UNITAS 49, we worked with Brazil and Argentina, both nations, in a multi-warfare exercise that was supposed to increase our coalition skills. And both the carrier and the air wings' participation accomplished a couple things.

With the Argentine navy, we worked with them a continuous series of anti-submarine warfare, air defense and surface exercises. An integrated task group that was of both U.S. and Argentine naval units -- we did a three-day simulated war-at-sea exercises against pretty sophisticated threats -- proficient diesel subs, high-performance fighter and attack aircraft and even modern cruise-missile shooters.

Today we're actually going to begin the transit of the Strait of Magellan and we're going to participate with bilateral task group exercises with Chilean and air and surface units here as soon as we get through. Once we're completely through the strait, we're going to conduct an anti-submarine warfare exercise and also provide some close air support.

And I was thinking about it again this morning, looking out there as the sun was coming up, that in 1520 Magellan was on a voyage of discovery. And in the process of that, he found a path between the Atlantic and Pacific, much

like we're duplicating once again; 488 years later, we're on our own voyage of discovery. But this one's different.

It's about hemispheric partnership. And so maybe with that as an opening context, I'd like to kind of open it up to the roundtable for discussion.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. David Axe, you were first with us, so why don't you introduce yourself and let's get started.

Q Great, thanks. Hi, this is David Axe with War Is Boring blog. Thanks for talking to us this morning. So my question is, is a carrier really the best platform for this kind of partnership training? You had talked about what sounded like maritime security as the major concern in the hemisphere, but then the exercises sound like they're high-end warfighting exercises. Wouldn't breaking up into smaller groups of surface warfare vessels be a better way to sort of meet the hemisphere's partners on equal terms?

ADM. CULLOM: Great question, David. The -- I think, to answer your question, the first thing I would say is that an aircraft carrier is the perfect platform to bring down here because we can cover an entire spectrum of training and exercising together, and it's a platform that we don't very frequently get the chance or opportunity to bring through here. What it brings with us is the ability to be able to do both high end and middle ground and low end spectrum of conflict, if you will, training, so that we can practice the high-end things that navies have to be able to do if they're going to work as coalitions in various places around the world.

At the same time, we can weave in exercises that help us for the 21st-century maritime security threats which we're seeing every single day. We don't see the high-end things nearly as frequently, but we have to be prepared to do both. So it gives us an opportunity with Brazil, Argentina and Chile to be able to do the whole spectrum of training.

Q Is it cost-effective? (Pause.) Hello?

ADM. CULLOM: Yeah. Actually, I think it is very cost-effective because we have to get from here to the Pacific. And from the perspective of -- we've got to get there some way, and this is a great way to do it.

We're actually getting a lot of stuff done while we're heading around which actually makes it, I think, very cost effective.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And Will.

Q Yes.

Hi. Good morning, Admiral. (Name inaudible) -- with Steeljaw Scribe. First off, always great to see an N-51 alum doing great out there, sir.

My question for you is, given what you've seen so far in the partnership exercise, assuming that you have, let's say, all of the systems commanders in front of you, what would you tell them are the top three capabilities that you as a CSG commander see as a shortfall, as far as operations that you've participated in so far in the Fourth Fleet AOR?

ADM. CULLOM: You were breaking up a little bit. I'm not sure who I'm talking with. So maybe you could kind of start over and then maybe tighten the question, because it broke up a little bit.

Q Sure. (Name inaudible) -- with Steeljaw Scribe.

The question is, if you have the systems commanders sitting in front of you, and based on the experience that you've had thus far in the Fourth Fleet AOR, what top three capabilities shortfalls have you seen, that you would express to those systems commanders, that you would see as a need?

MR. HOLT: Okay.

ADM. CULLOM: No, I didn't drop out. I'm still here. It cut out a little bit, but I got the gist of the question. I think what you're asking me is, if I had NAV-C or the SYSCOMs and whatnot in front of me, what would we -- what would I suggest to them of what we need to do operating in Fourth Fleet? And I think that narrows down to most directly and most simply is interoperability with our allies. And the gear and the equipment that it takes, to be able to do that, is really the key for what we need to continue to really draw the hemisphere together, to draw the navies within the hemisphere together.

Q Okay.

Anything as far as a particular warfare area?

ADM. CULLOM: Yeah.

I think probably the primary one would be command and control, the systems that are related to command and control.

Those tend to be the ones that help us the most. In a 21st century world it's about C4I and C5I.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anybody else --

ADM. CULLOM: And actually, let me add one more thing, too, that I think is really relevant. We had a conference while we were in Rio about information sharing, and it was a great conference because what we realized is we all -- all the navies in the world have a lot of information to be able to share, and about contacts that are on the sea, above the sea, that are in the maritime environment, whether it's in the blue water, the green water or the brown water.

The problem is, we don't often share that information on a real-time basis so that we can all truly understand where the potential threats are. The discussions in Rio were fantastic from the standpoint of truly understanding the things that stand in our way and being able to link that information together.

Right now one of the systems that I think a lot of folks are looking at is MSSIS and how we can keep track and share information on things that are

moving around the sea from all around, from one country to another. But right now we don't completely connect the dots between different parts of the world, and I think that's one thing that could really come out of the increased and -- discussions on this topic on information sharing.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And somebody else joined us? (Pause.)

Okay. Well, let's just -- any follow-up questions? Let's just open the discussion up here.

Q Hey, Jack, this is -- (name inaudible) --? again. I've got one follow-up.

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q Given that the carrier is a very high-level presence in the region that you were passing through, what was the reaction of the partner nations to this ongoing interest now with the standup of 4th Fleet and possible greater U.S. presence in the region?

ADM. CULLOM: I think there's a lot -- there is a bit of misunderstanding about Fourth Fleet. I think Admiral Stavridis the other day spoke to this to try to make sure people understood that Fourth Fleet is not specifically about presence. It's much more about planning -- planning and cooperation in our ability to work together. And that's what Fourth Fleet, the stand-up of the Fourth Fleet, will do -- is a lot more people to help work with the other navy planning staffs.

Q Okay. Well, just as a follow-up with that, there's still -- even with the intense planning between with the staffs, just the fact that there is a new fleet or an enhanced U.S. presence in the region -- reaction from the partner nations along those lines.

MR. HOLT: I'm sorry, Will, could you ask the question again? I think we broke up.

Q Sure. Granted that this was more of a planning than a full-time presence mission, but what's been the reaction from some of the major partner nations, say Brazil and Argentina, to what would appear to be the U.S. reawakening to we have to some sort of presence or some increased level of presence in the region, and working with the nations down there -- particularly with regards to, let's say, Venezuela -- and what's going on there?

ADM. CULLOM: Well, I think the first thing is that the reaction from Brazil and Argentina -- and those are the two that we've worked with so far -- has been just very ecstatic that we are -- that we're working with them, and that the dialogue is very robust.

They have really enjoyed, I think, the fact that we came down here with pretty much a full air wing of aircraft that allowed us to be able to exercise and practice, and the fact that we had a lot of discussions both in the Rio and a number of distinguished visitor groups that came out while we were off the coast of Argentina to be able to talk with us here.

Another key piece, too, is liaison officers. We've had -- just in the exercises in UNITAS, we had over 50 officers between Brazil and Argentina that were with us in watching flight operations, working with us, and it was a

chance to share equally learning about the way they do things and the way we do things. And it's -- that is going to be important for a whole new generation of young officers and mid- grade and senior enlisted personnel, because we had that whole spectrum of people that were a part of the exercises of as far as a exchange of personnel. And that's been, I think, one of the most rewarding things seen come out of it.

Q Okay, sir, thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And David, are you still with us?

Q Sure, yeah, yeah. I can do a follow-up.

Admiral, David Axe again from War is Boring. So about this exercise with the Argentine Navy, this anti-submarine exercise. I understand the target was a diesel sub. So, how did that go?

ADM. CULLOM: The exercise was a -- actually, it was a couple of exercises, it wasn't just one. We did more than one. And they were great from the standpoint of us being able to exercise against a type of submarine that we don't have in the United States, and to be able to do it in the home waters in and around Argentina. So they were the experts in the water area down here, and we were the people who didn't know as much about the water, so we had to be particularly challenging and challenge ourselves and our skill set in anti-submarine warfare to try to be able to have mission success.

Mission success for an aircraft carrier in a carrier strike group is in some cases -- the mission kill, if you will, is that you never get close enough to be shot at by the submarine. And from that standpoint, we're still trying to do the reconstructions, and I don't actually have the final tally on this, but I think everyone got a lot out of the exercises, both the Argentines as well as the United States.

Q So there were no nasty surprises with sunk aircraft carriers?

ADM. CULLOM: (Chuckles.) No, there were no nasty surprises, but a lot of good learning, and that's the point of these things is -- is that everybody learns something from them. And I think from that standpoint, we definitely know that that's the case so far.

Q Well, on that front, to follow up, there's been some chatter out there lately about the decay in navy assets and skills for anti-submarine warfare. Was that a factor at all in this exercise? Did you have the robust depth of resources you need to tackle a threat like a diesel sub?

ADM. CULLOM: Great question, David. And the answer to that is that ASW, as you probably well know, is something that it takes to -- to get good at it, you've got to train, and you have to train a lot. The more you train at it, the more you understand how environment -- the environment -- the acoustic environment plays a huge part in being able to get good at this. But it's also -- it's as much an art as it is a science, and that's why the more we do these things, the better.

I wouldn't say that degradation in our skill sets -- I think that's what you were asking -- I think that we have great skill sets added, and we just need to continue to practice to them. We've done -- my strike group has done a number of those exercises over the last year, and we've actually practiced

against diesel submarines before, including a Brazilian submarine that came up to -- right off the coast of the United States for a joint task force exercise last year. They were a formidable foe, but we were also very good at our skill set, and again, everybody got something out of it. And I think we showed that we're still pretty darn good at anti-submarine and undersea warfare.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Well, if we've got no more questions -- I know we're running right up close to time here, sir. So if you've got any final thoughts for us --

ADM. CULLOM: Yeah. I think that the final closing comment would be that, first off, I love this new technology. I think it's great, because it disseminates information quickly and allows people to really kind of be along with us as we travel around South America and where -- and other parts of the world for other carrier strike groups. And I think that it's generating a whole new generation of interest in what we do out here in the maritime. And that's important, because, as I said at the very beginning, 90 percent of the world's trade goes by the ocean. That percentage is only going to increase over the next 10 and 20 years, which means that the maritime matters, the maritime is important. In a globalizing world, it's more important than ever.

So I hope you keep following us. You can go to our website. Just Google out there and look for the Carrier Strike Group 8, CSG-8, and follow along on our journey. I'm posting, we're posting, some blog comments that we do kind of on a pretty routine basis. And you can send in questions to us.

You can also see what we're doing. You can actually follow my podcast. And you can see how things are going. So I hope you do. I encourage all the readers and listeners on this blog to follow along with us.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much. And we'll be putting up the links and things to your sites and look forward to it.

I don't think we've, well, we haven't spoken to the commander of a carrier strike group transitioning anything so far yet. But it's pretty exciting to be able to speak to you as your transitioning at the Strait of Magellan. And we do appreciate you being with us, sir, and we hope that we can speak with you again.

ADM. CULLOM: Okay. Well, I'd look forward to it. And I hope we can do this again. And just either look for George Washington, Carrier Strike Group 8 or Partnership of the Americas, any one of those three, and you'll find us.

So talk to you soon. Out here.

END.